United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea SPLOS/177

Meeting of States Parties

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Letter dated 18 April 2008 from the Chairman of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf addressed to the President of the eighteenth Meeting of States Parties

1. In my capacity as Chairman of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, I wish to inform you about the progress of work of the Commission since the seventeenth Meeting of States Parties, in June 2007.

2. It may be recalled that the Commission was established to perform two specific functions, as set out in article 3 (1) of annex II to the Convention:

(a) To consider the data and other material submitted by coastal States concerning the outer limits of the continental shelf in areas where those limits extend beyond 200 nautical miles, and to make recommendations in accordance with article 76 and the Statement of Understanding adopted on 29 August 1980 by the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea;

(b) To provide scientific and technical advice, if requested by the coastal State concerned, during the preparation of the data referred to in subparagraph (a).

3. Since the seventeenth Meeting of States Parties, the Commission has held its twentieth and twenty-first sessions. The twentieth session was held at United Nations Headquarters from 27 August to 14 September 2007. The resumed part of the twentieth session was held from 21 January to 1 February 2008. The twenty-first session of the Commission was held from 17 March to 18 April 2008. Details of the work of the Commission at its twentieth, resumed twentieth and twenty-first sessions are contained in the statements of the Chairman on the progress of work (CLCS/56 and CLCS/58).

Organizational and other matters at the sessions

4. The twentieth session was the first to be attended by the members elected at the seventeenth Meeting of States Parties. Pursuant to rule 10 of the rules of procedure of the Commission (CLCS/40), each member of the Commission made the solemn declaration in writing and delivered it to the Director of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, Office of Legal Affairs. The Commission elected by acclamation Alexandre Tagore Medeiros de Albuquerque as Chairman. Lawrence Folajimi Awosika, Harald Brekke, Yuri Borisovitch Kazmin and Yong-ahn

Park were elected by acclamation as Vice-Chairmen. In accordance with rule 13 of the rules of procedure, the Chairman of the Commission and the Vice-Chairmen were elected for a term of two and a half years.

5. In the light of the partial change in membership of the Commission, the Commission filled certain vacancies in the subcommissions and reconstituted its subsidiary bodies: the Standing Committee on provision of scientific and technical advice to coastal States, the Committee on Confidentiality, the Editorial Committee, and the Training Committee.

6. At the twenty-first session, pursuant to rule 10 of the rules of procedure, one member of the Commission, Indurlall Fagoonee, who had not attended the twentieth session following his re-election as a member of the Commission, signed the solemn declaration and transmitted it to the Director of the Division. It was noted that George Jaoshvili did not attend the session. In this connection, I wish to point out that, since the election of the present membership of the Commission, Mr. Jaoshvili has not assumed his functions and has not made the solemn declaration as required by the rules of procedure of the Commission, and that no communication has been received from him.

7. Also at the twenty-first session, Václav Mikulka, Director of the Division, informed the Commission about the work carried out by the Secretariat following the adoption by the General Assembly of its resolution 62/215 to ensure enhanced support and assistance to the Commission and its subcommissions before the session. In particular, he noted the acquisition of licences for the software packages required by the Commission to analyse the submissions it receives; the upgrade to the computer network used by the Commission and its subcommissions; and the establishment of a third permanent Geographic Information System (GIS) laboratory on the premises of the Division. The Director also recalled that the seventeenth Meeting of States Parties requested coastal States parties to submit to the Secretariat information on whether they intend to make a submission to the Commission, and requested the Secretariat to report the information thus collected to States parties. Attention was drawn to document SPLOS/INF/20, which confirms that the Commission should expect a high volume of submissions in the coming years. Following the issuance of that document, the Secretariat has been informed by some States which had not responded to the initial request to provide information of their intention to make a submission. There is also a possibility that some States which to date have given no indication of their intention to make a submission may nevertheless do so.

8. Also at the twenty-first session, in view of the additional information technology resources that will be made available to the Commission pursuant to General Assembly resolution 62/215, staff of the General Legal Division of the Office of Legal Affairs made a presentation to the members of the Commission on issues relating to the legal status of the Commission as well as legal issues relating to intellectual property used or developed in the course of the work of the Commission.

9. Also at that session, the Commission amended the rules of procedure. The revised rules of procedure are contained in document CLCS/40/Rev.1.

Consideration of submissions

10. During both sessions, the Commission and its subcommissions continued their consideration of the submissions made by Australia, New Zealand and Norway, as well as of the joint submission made by France, Ireland, Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. On 22 May 2007, the Commission received a new submission made by France and, on 13 December 2007, a new submission made by Mexico. In each case, the Commission established, in accordance with established procedure, a subcommission to examine the submission.

11. Also, at its twenty-first session, the Commission completed its consideration of and adopted the "Recommendations of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in regard to the submission made by Australia on 15 November 2004 on information on the proposed outer limits of its continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles". In view of the size and complexity of that submission, the adoption of those recommendations represents a significant achievement in the work of the Commission.

12. Also at that session, the Commission received from the Subcommission established for consideration of the submission made by New Zealand the text of the recommendations as prepared by that Subcommission. On 3 April 2008, the delegation of New Zealand made a presentation on matters related to its submission to the plenary of the Commission. The Commission decided to defer the consideration of the recommendations to the twenty-second session.

Future work of the Commission

13. The twenty-second session of the Commission will be held from 11 August to 12 September 2008, on the understanding that the period from 18 to 29 August would be devoted to plenary meetings and that the periods from 11 to 15 August and from 2 to 12 September would be used for the technical examination of submissions at the GIS laboratories and other technical facilities of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea. The Subcommission established to examine the submission of France will meet from 11 to 15 August. The Subcommission established to examine the submission of Norway will meet from 2 to 12 September. The Subcommission established to examine the submission of Mexico will meet from 2 to 5 September. The Subcommission established to consider the submission of four coastal States will meet from 11 to 15 August and from 2 to 5 September. The Secretariat informed the Commission that the following dates had been reserved for the plenary meetings of the twenty-third and twenty-fourth sessions of the Commission: 23 March to 3 April and 24 August to 4 September 2009. The Commission requested the Secretariat to maintain the same pattern for plenary meetings of the Commission in 2010.

14. In recent years, the workload of the Commission has substantially increased. Furthermore, with the large number of submissions expected by May 2009, as tentatively indicated in SPLOS/INF/20, the workload before the Commission will increase manyfold.

15. In this context, on behalf of the Commission, I would like to express our thanks to the Meeting of States Parties for its continued support for the Commission's efforts aimed at coping with its workload.

16. I would also like to express my thanks to the Division for the high standard of secretariat services it renders to the Commission. The initiatives of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea greatly facilitate the work of the Commission in the discharge of its functions as mandated by the Convention. In this context, the Commission acknowledges with deep appreciation the various facilities provided by the Division, in particular, the setting up of the third GIS laboratory and the introduction of advanced technical network solutions as well as newly acquired software packages.

I would like to request that the present letter be circulated as a document of the eighteenth Meeting of States Parties.

(*Signed*) Alexandre Tagore Medeiros de **Albuquerque**
Chairman of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf